

DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA 91125

MORSE RETURNS IN 1882

Robert A. Rosenstone



HUMANITIES WORKING PAPER 106

August 1984

ABSTRACT

How this American scientist returns not to do science, but to collect pottery and folk art; and how he and Ernest Fenollosa and William Sturgis Bigelow scour the countryside for valuable objets; and how he lingers on, unable to leave Japan; and how he studies tea ceremony and Noh drama singing (utai) in an effort to experience the world from the Japanese point of view.

CHAPTER IV - Section 2

MORSE RETURNS IN 1882

Here you are again. So impossible. So simple. As if thirty-two months are so many breaths of air. Darkness, just like the first time. Once more the tall ships above the sculls, the stone piers, the huge shed that is customs, the officials in uniform, the brightly lit public rooms of the Grand Hotel. But that's not what you came back for. Go out into the rain. Wave away the rickshaw men, cross the wooden bridge over the creek, and plunge along the narrow roadway through Homura. Close to midnight. Too late for any of the tiny shops to be open. No matter. People clattering along on high clogs, the flicker of lanterns behind shoji, the hum of voices within the houses, the odor of tea and food cooked with soy sauce--that's what has been missing for too long.

Morning lets you play tour guide. Let's forget about the Bund, the Bluff, the Chinese quarter. Yokohama is a rotten town--reckless, indecent, full of gouges and horse jockeys, not to mention missionaries. Let's get away from here and into Japan. Board the train and point to the familiar fields and hills, rivers and bay. Omori station. Just there. Those are the shell heaps, or what's left of them. Shimbashi, the end of the line. The same brick building; the same crowds; the same rows of rickshaw; the same sweet motion swaying through the streets. But something has changed. A different route. Ginza and Nihonbashi are impassable, torn up to lay tracks for a horse railway. Up we go, over a moat and through the castle grounds.

Massive stone walls, thick groves of trees, glimpses of a sombre gray city below.

On the Hongo, everything is just as you remember--the watch repair man on the corner; that curious dwarf with no chin; the fish-chopper tapping away; the gold beater pounding monotonously; the cooper; the straw maker; the dry goods shop. Dismount to smiles and hearty cries. Yes, they remember you; yes, they ask after Oksama, John-san and Edie-san. Take a minute for the second-hand stores. Nothing interesting in the way of pottery; no tea bowls at all. What a change! Maybe its true, what they say: a revival of chanoyu among the Japanese, a craze for pottery among the English and French; an interest even among Americans.

Those great wooden gates are familiar, but can that really be Kaga Yashiki? Dr. Murray's old house has a new wing, full of classrooms, and next to it the foundations of a large building are under way. At the university, bows from clerks and warm handshakes from colleagues, fine tea in Kutani cups and excellent imported cigars. Toyama, Yatabe, Kikuchi, Hattori, and Kato--all are there, full of talk about their work and questions about yours. The lab looks much the same, but step across the street and into a new, two-story building: the Zoological Museum, your plans for construction carried out to the last detail. Next to the entrance in the main hall hangs a life-size portrait. Stop a moment and take a look. Your own eyes stare back with an unfamiliar gaze. Dare you call it immortality?

June 1882. No family with Edward S. Morse this time, but he does have a companion: William Sturgis Bigelow, Harvard '71, an MD who prefers collecting objects and ideas to practicing medicine. Sword guards, Buddhism, landscapes--this Brahmin's interests run to anything that will keep him away from Boston. Morse is ready to collect as well. But no shells this time; nothing like spiders, crickets, or worms. Objects shaped by the touch of human hands are now his aim: pottery, and all those daily items described in such loving detail in his journals--tools, shop signs, baskets, candle holders, utensils, dolls, hair ornaments, clogs, umbrellas, fishing poles, fans, marionettes, lacquer boxes, brushes, pieces of cloth and hand-made paper. And also something else that cannot be crated. Something in the emptiness of rooms, the softness of tatami, the shadow of leaves on shoji, the upswept curve of temple roofs, the strange familiarity of gardens in moss and stone--these are the kind of things to be collected by pen strokes on paper.

Ask him, and Morse can explain why he's here again in words that will sound reasonable enough. Pottery, my boy. Almost two thousand pieces at home, true, but that's no more than a good beginning. Two years of close study and now I have a sense of what is missing. Research for a few months, buying carefully and in the right places and my collection will be the largest, the most complete, the best in the world. Besides, as new director of the Peabody Museum I have an obligation. To the board, to the people of Salem, to posterity.

Imagine the first ethnological collection of things Japanese. Nobody else is gathering all those things. Think of it. If I do this right, fifty, a hundred years from now people will have to come to Salem to get the feel, shape and look of all these simple items that every Japanese, rich and poor, sees or uses everyday. That's a target worth shooting at.

No doubt. But other reasons fill the gaps between the words. To explain them is to look for meaning in things not done, in actions that remain forever incomplete. When Morse goes home in 1879, it is as a kind of double missionary. On the lecture circuit he now has two major topics: natural history and Japan. At professional scientific meetings, he can be asked questions about both. Even Darwin's letter, written to commend his Omori publication, slides easily from one realm to the other: "What a constant state of fluctuation the whole organic world seems to be in! . . . Of all the wonders of the world, the progress of Japan, in which you have been aiding, seems to me about the most wonderful." The general public agrees. A Japan lecture series at the Lowell Institute becomes, according to the Boston press, the hit of the 1880 season: "No other of the several winter courses has been so thronged and no other has given such apparent delight. The Audiences have surged up to the very platform steps. . . ."

Popularity helps to fill the pocket book and to keep Morse busy as ever. Lectures and articles, small research projects on wasps and bird behavior, trips to New England shell heaps, and the new position as director of the Peabody Museum--all this should mean he is occupied and

happy. Yet as the months go on something is amiss. Work is not working its usual charm. Hints of restlessness and dissatisfaction, luxuries once unknown to him, are there in one striking fact: the most important projects are not underway. That long-planned popular work on evolution, that second book on zoology--he now has little taste for either. Odder still: for all the notes and journal pages and pieces of pottery, he cannot get started on a volume about Japan.

Blame nostalgia, a wordless longing for certain sights, smells, tastes, and feelings that become so precious in memory. Then look at a photo taken in the study of his Salem home. Morse sits at a plain plank table heaped with pottery, shells, papers, ash trays full of cigar butts. Overhead, a gas chandelier with four opaque white globes; on the floor, a torn strip of coconut fiber matting. Wooden folding chairs flank the table; sagging shelves along the wall are heaped with pamphlets and books; cardboard filing cabinets are piled in the corner. No curtains soften the windows. For relief the eye seeks out the meager decorations--a horseshoe crab mounted on a board, a photo of son John, a small steel engraving of a European city scene. Now picture the rooms in Japan, at inns and the homes of colleagues and government officials; think of them as they appear in Morse's loving words. And think of him in that Salem study thinking about those rooms. Then you have to know that the desire to return there to collect crafts and folk arts and still more pottery is also an expression of something else.

The return of a hero--that's the way it seems. Those first weeks back in Tokyo, Morse's hours are hardly his own. Once a sensei always a sensei--now is the time to learn that this word carries a load of respect and homage that "teacher" can never fully convey. Everyone wants to see him, hear his opinions, show him things, get his approval. So many exquisite dinners, hosted by former associates; so many public events that mix pleasure and duty. He delivers lectures--on "changes in fauna" to the monthly meeting of the Biological Society that he founded; on the "antiquity of man with a sketch of the evidences of his lowly origin" to an audience of fifteen hundred in a new, Western-style hall; on the work of their American and European counterparts to the members of the Japan Fish Commission. He makes symbolic appearances--attends a concert given by students of Western music and finds the performances to be "remarkably good"; sits on the platform for the graduation exercises of the Tokyo Female Normal School.

During this period, Morse and Bigelow live in housing provided by the university. Nothing grand, just a small, two-room building in Western-style, set between the astronomical observatory and a hospital for the insane, a pleasant spot where one is "lulled to sleep by the songs of the maniacs." By the end of June the surfaces of Morse's bed, bureaus, bookshelves, washstand, and desk are heaped high with "pottery, books, papers, etc." Already he has been collecting whatever he can find, and finding that the capital city is not all that good for collectibles. A visit to the estate of a former daimyo, Prince Kikkawa of Iwakuni, who shares art treasures dating back seven hundred years,

only serves to whet an appetite already keen. Time to get to work. Time to leave Tokyo, its modern schools and hospitals, its gas-lit streets and brick buildings. Time to experience something missing in the capital, to see "a little of the life of old Japan."

Not so fast. Weeks go into preparing for the trip. Morse must gather advice on the best places for antiquities, secure letters of introduction to regional officials, obtain a passport valid "for at least a dozen provinces," and make travel arrangements with two companions, Bigelow and Ernest F. Fenollosa. The doctor is ready to go anywhere that presents opportunities to purchase swords and lacquer ware. Fenollosa, a twenty-nine year old Harvard graduate, owes his appointment in 1878 as the first professor of philosophy at Tokyo University to Morse's recommendation. Four years in Japan have stimulated his aesthetic interests and moved him in the direction of art history. Now his conversation is full of vague and grandiose plans for explaining the great traditions of East Asian art to the West and his rooms full of a large and first-rate collection of historic scrolls and paintings.

Three Americans on the road in search of art--that's the title for the summer interlude. Or maybe one should say "three New Englanders." Something about planning the trip excites in Morse a most uncharacteristic regional pride. Future success gleams in his eye, but a kind strange enough for a man whose identity has been so involved with natural science. The expected results of the summer's labors are easy enough to predict: "We shall have in the vicinity of Boston by

far the greatest collection of Japanese art in the world." These words, penned for his own consumption, swell with a new kind of pride. He will become--is becoming--part of an important new realm for different from the one where he has dwelt in all the years since childhood. And this is not just for his knowledge of pottery. Morse still aims to write that book about Japan, but now he sees the need to focus on something specific, tangible, concrete, something that can encompass his entire reaction to this land.

Architecture is the choice, and with good reason. The homes and inns here have always fascinated him. Rooms that once could seem barren as those of a house "to be let," soon enough proved to be charming in their absolute cleanliness, refinement, and "Quaker-like simplicity." Everywhere in the land you can rest on straw mats and let yourself be soothed by the subdued, neutral colors of walls and screens, and the natural wood of the ceilings, let the eyes have the pleasure of lingering on the tokonoma, with its single scroll, or rough bit of pottery and simple spray of flowers. How different from rooms at home, jammed with heavy furniture, stuffed as curiosity shops with "vases, pictures, plaques, bronzes, with shelves, brackets, cabinets, and tables loaded down with bric-a-brac." Here, in such a contrast, lies a rare opportunity. By describing Japanese homes in detail, maybe Morse can show Americans there is another way; maybe he can help to improve their taste.

Let the long days begin to stretch out into heat, dense humidity, the thickening green of bush, tree, and rice field, the rasp of cicadas

in the shade. But don't do the details of the two-month trip--we have had too much of that already. Even Morse quickly wearies of recording each day's events. Carefully he notes the departure from Tokyo on July 26, the stage ride to Sammaibashi, the eight miles he and Fenollosa do on foot up a steep mountain road while Bigelow rides in a kago, the fast pace that makes it difficult to stop and sketch the new forms of balcony, fence, gateway, and interior that catch his eye in every village. Soon the journey takes on the feeling of memory. Inns marred by fleas, mountains and waterfalls, flat boats at river crossings, farmers in huge straw hats, religious pilgrims--all are so familiar to him, and us, that notes give way to summaries: "It was difficult to keep an itinerary of the journey overland. We lost the day of the week and even the month. We had grand rides and tiresome ones, saw beautiful scenery, crossed long bridges over wide and shallow streams, stopped at interesting tea houses; and at all times received that courteous attention which characterizes this people above all others."

The search for booty--that's what makes this trip unique. Imagination turns the Americans into a roving band of warriors. All along the Tokaido, they descend upon unsuspecting towns to "ransack" or "make raids" on second-hand stores, and carry away all the local treasures. On days when Bigelow and Fenollosa tire of the game, and relax on the soft, springy tatami of a lovely inn, Morse bustles out as usual. A year later, the doctor will want to relive those moments when they would await the return of their friend: "We want to see the look that he used to wear when he came in from a raid around a new town,

accompanied by two or three grinning, astonished, obsequious doguyas, bearing a pile of boxes and loose pots. -- And then the triumph . . . when he displayed his treasures--got them all out on the floor, finally producing from his pocket as a thing too precious to let the other men bring home, some particularly demoralized-looking piece of old coprolite--`A Koyashi, by God! -- 650 years old--a genuine Unko Koyashi, with a stamp! -- Never saw but two others & one of those Ninagawa asked 30 yens for, & I got this for 15 sen! And his stamp did not compare with this!`"

Passion like this can take hold of Morse anywhere, for real finds surface in the most unexpected spots. Sometimes a town like Shizuoka proves rich enough interesting objects to keep them for an extra day; sometimes a village like Toyohachi provides a startling number of "good pieces." No surprise that cities detain them the longest. Nagoya, close to the ancient pottery district of Seto, is so rich in antiques that they only manage a rushed visit to its famed seventeenth century castle in the late afternoon of their fourth, and final, day. Here they are forced into a strategy that will become common in other large, urban areas. Rather than stroll the streets looking for shops, they stay in the hotel to receive merchants: "Dealers were coming to our rooms all the time, sometimes eight or ten at a time, spreading out their stock in trade on the floor. Up to the last hour of our stay we were buying things. . . ."

First hours are important too. Early each morning Morse is up before the others, sketching the places where they stay. The eye that

once scrutinized the tiniest of shelled creatures is not satisfied with the broad forms of rooms, hallways, roofs, balconies, gardens, and fences, but also seeks out the tiniest and humblest of details. Morse takes time to examine and describe hikite, the small metal plates that fit into fusuma to serve as pulls; the ornamental nailheads used in tokonoma; the closets with swinging doors built under flights of stairs; the shoe racks at entrances; furnishings like oil lamps, candle sticks, bamboo towel racks, hibachi in wood and ceramic, and the block-like pillows that once almost crippled his neck. Because they are so different from home, he seems especially fascinated by kitchens with braziers and primitive ovens; bathrooms with deep wooden tubs that have built-in fireboxes; and privies with tiny flower pots and fragrant, hand-finished interiors.

The overland journey ends on August 10. Beyond Osaka, the waters of the Inland Sea carry the Americans toward the West and into a haze of reveries for ages past. In Hiroshima, steamer gives way to native junk, and when the wind dies, they are propelled by four men with long, clumsy oars. For one afternoon, time seems to hesitate and pottery fades from mind. On the flat roof of the boat's cabin, Morse and Bigelow lean back against piles of straw matting, smoke Manila cigars, alternately doze and open their eyes to admire a visual feast--pine-covered islands, the jutting headlands of Shikoku, glimpses of orange shrines, sails bright against the sea. Something stirs within Morse. He wants words for the moment, words that will match the glory of the scene before him. But all he can produce are phrases spoken and heard

before by someone else: "The experience was unique, sailing . . . through one of the most picturesque and beautiful waterways in the world."

Take such stirrings as a sign of change. The man who five years before never stopped at Kamakura on those many trips from Enoshima to Tokyo has begun to relax. From now on he will allow time for the historic and the sacred, for side trips that have nothing to do with buying pottery, for wandering in the deer park at Nara and climbing the castle walls in Wakayama, for an overnight stay on the island of Miyajima, where tides run under the corridors of a great temple and a colossal torii rises from the sea. Descriptions of scenery--rare in his notes before this trip--become common. Limited they are, but whether by perception or vocabulary it is impossible to say. Morse seems to strain against the boundaries of language. Usually he settles for a well-worn image--the "crumbling" wayside shrine, the "charming" tea house, "picturesque" valley. But occasionally there comes a breakthrough into a moment all his own--say that special twilight when a typical, cheery country town becomes a huddle of high, thatched roofs, dark against white mists that ghostly rise from meadows and fields of rice.

Such an image relates to "old Japan," an exhausted phrase that Morse suddenly uses with regularity. Landscapes, buildings, people, customs--all help to energize the longings that brought him back, to provoke feelings no less painful for eluding words. Once again cultural comparisons cannot be avoided; once again this nation

highlights shortcomings at home. How clear this is on the night of a river festival when Bigelow hires a large, flat-bottomed boat, complete with food, drink, dancing girls and fireworks. Out they go into a "scene of gayety." Boats sparkle with red and yellow strings of lanterns, and one feels an air of innocent sensuality as "hundreds of merry groups pass back and forth, with the sound of samisen and koto, singing and laughter . . ." Such pleasure leads to rumination: "Nearly every town in our country has a river, bay, pond, or lake. Why can't our people indulge in similar holidays?" The answer--"such assemblies on the water are possible . . . only in countries of good manners"--only leads to another question that he will never phrase. Better to forget questions altogether, to live this "Old Japan" and not ask what or how it got that way.

Iwakuni is the place to do that. They arrive on a balmy, mid-August night full of the spiky shapes of palms and the smell of the tropics. Crowds cluster around them, crowds of a sort Morse has "never before experienced." For seven years the town has not seen a foreigner. Everything the Americans do, every movement made, is watched with the kind of awe-struck wonder that greeted the first Westerners in the Empire: "One has a curious mixture of emotions at being deliberately stared at by a crowd; in a way, it is embarrassing . . . You feel how absurd or inexplicable some of your movements must be to the starers. You try to affect indifference, and yet you are conscious of an added dignity and importance at being stared at. You are guilty of performing acts specially to excite their attention, such as turning

your pockets inside out, for a pocket in Japanese clothing is . . . unknown . . . You raise a laugh by some gesture of annoyance; sometimes to find you are making a fool of yourself, when all the time the effort is to appear calm and natural."

An invitation from Prince Kikkawa has brought them here--twenty-five miles west of Hiroshima, two hundred and fifty from Osaka. Until twelve years before, this was part of his domain. Now feudalism may be at an end, but to step into Iwakuni is to walk into the past. Everyone is in traditional costume. No pants, boots, dresses, shorn heads: "Indeed, not a foreign notion or scrap did we see during our whole visit." The hospitality is traditional too. Not a sen are the Americans allowed to pay for the most royal treatment--sleeping quarters in a private hotel, built originally to house the guests of the daimyo and decorated with "beautiful old screens and Kakemono"; special meals prepared by a "famous cook" imported from some distant place; presents of antique swords and ancient pieces of pottery; and guided excursions day and night--up the river to the once-famous but now extinct Tada pottery works; to the local theater where they "afford a greater spectacle to the audience than the play itself"; to the recently established cotton mill, with rooms so immaculate and operatives so clean and happy that one can scarcely recognize this as modern industry. The fussing, the courtesy, the hospitality--to Morse all this is "old Japan." When, they depart after two days, hundreds smile and bow their rickshas on, he feels "overwhelming gratitude and affection for the Japanese race, and particularly for the Prince of

Kikkawa and his loyal subjects, who preserve, as of old, their fealty to their prince." Elsewhere he puts it more simply. Except for the absence of swords, he has seen Japan "as it was in feudal times," experienced the "manners, customs, and courtesies" of that bygone age. The good Yankee, democrat, and scientist has lived for a moment in a feudal social order and can sum up the experience in a single word: "Idyllic."

Tokyo in the fall. Visitors and natives alike find it a lovely season. Let the newspapers be your guide. Terajima for the "seven grasses of autumn"; Meguro and Asakusa for chrysanthemums; Konodai, Oji and Tokaiji for maple leaves; the banks of the Sumida for "sweet singing insects." And Fuji. Its always been there, but never so sharp as when the winds of autumn sweep the sky free of haze, never so beautiful as when the snow cap lengthens and the sun through shadows of clouds paints it with patches of white. But maybe its not Fuji at all. Its always been there. Maybe its this fresh autumn weather, and the summer behind you, the dozens of notebooks filled with barely legible scrawls, and the heaps of pots and artifacts. Maybe its not Fuji. Maybe the change is in the eyes. Maybe its you.

Not much to do these days, and yet you keep busy. No reason to stay, and yet you do not leave. Something is unfinished, but what? Surely its not those empty pages. You could keep on filling them forever. More than a thousand are devoted to notes on customs,

artifacts, names, implements, traditions, games. Who else has recorded the fact that the fishermen of Wakanoura boil pine bark to tan their nets but not their sails; or has sketched the difference between plows in the provinces of Yamashiro, Suo, Chikuzen, and Kii; or has noticed that brokers in the Osaka Rich Exchange fling their hands about and shout just like their counterparts on the Corn Exchange in Chicago? Who else has jotted down all those daily superstitions that everyone both understands and denies believing: that an itchy head means happiness, or that cutting fingernails at night shows that one is going crazy, or that tea leaves floating vertically in a cup are a sure sign that good fortune is on the way?

Pottery can't be the reason for staying. The professional packers are finishing their job by the beginning of November. Daily they pick their way through the tangle of confusion that is your room, wrap cups, bowls, water jars, vases, and plates in handfuls of straw and place them carefully in large, wooden boxes while the local children peer through the door, amazed to see so much pottery in one place. Twenty-nine hundred pieces, more than double the original collection. You have taken such detailed notes in interviews with famed Kyoto potters like Rokubei, Yeiraku, and Kichizayemon, made so many impressions of the stamps of each lineage, copied down so many stories of great ancestors and their masterpieces, that your pottery journal is now much longer than your daily diary. More than material for a single book, you have accumulated enough to last "a lifetime." But only on one condition--only if you "can ever leave this angelic country."

You can't. Not yet. Life here seems so pleasant, so interesting, so full of some promise that cannot be defined. And the days are so easy to fill that you scarcely notice them. At the laboratory and the museum, the professors welcome your suggestions, advice, supervision, and eagerly listen to talks on the latest scientific developments in the West. Private schools and public groups are eager to hear lectures on the animal kingdom, evolution, or the ancient inhabitants of Japan. Both absorbing and time-consuming are new passions that have sprung from older ones. The intricate patterns of thatched roofs brings you to a serious study of roof tiles, old and new; the search for pottery in caves leads to detailed questions about ancient burial customs. More difficult it is to locate the origin of your interest in arrow-release. Perhaps you have long been interested in archery, but the first mention of it comes in August when, at Sanjusangendo's sixteenth century temple and gallery in Kyoto, you manage to hit a far-off target several times. Ever since, you have been seeking experts--Japanese, Ainu, Korean--to learn about the bow-pulling techniques of their traditions. This is Darwinism applied to human history, an intuitive sense that the level of a civilization may be determined by the complexity of its methods of archery.

Curious what a natural scientist can get himself into if he's not careful. But hardly surprising. Once the walls come down, it's difficult to build new ones. Besides, why take the trouble? Shells lead to pots and pots to the world--the movement is from the hand of God to that of man. Not that you need to believe in either to slip

from comparison towards social criticism. But there it is during your final months in Tokyo. You spend a pleasant afternoon at the crematory in Senju, find it a surprisingly efficient and inexpensive way of disposing of corpses, and wonder how long "prejudice" will stand in the way of "this sanitary process in our country." You visit the poorest quarter of Tokyo and hear "no loud cries or shouting," see "no bleary-eyed drunkards" or dirty children, encounter no hostility or fistfights as you would in the slums at home. You meet the government's chief statistician and learn that in a decade only eleven murders have been committed in Tokyo, then find a recent report from Michigan, where eighty-nine murders were committed in the single year of 1879. You finally get around to mentioning geisha as "good-natured, witty and sprightly girls . . . who earn their living by entertaining at dinners" and are far better company than "the usual run of girls and women" at home. You begin to think that Americans "have much to learn from Japanese life," but are incapable of saying what you yourself can learn from it.

Some questions cannot be answered in words. That is the lesson of a glorious, late October afternoon when the Emperor's gardens are for the first time thrown open to university professors and high government officers. Hundreds of men, women, and children, exquisitely dressed in formal kimono, sedately wander through a once level plain that centuries ago became this area of hills and valleys, rock ravines with plunging brooks, tiny mirror lakes crossed by arched bridges, wooden summer houses behind rustic fences. Words once again fail to contain

experience. You can readily admit "I have neither the language nor the ability to describe the wonderful beauty of the grounds," just as you can still make judgments: "The Japanese excel the world in the art of landscape gardening." But never have you been so conscious of some gnawing gap between what is and what you want. Maybe it is triggered by that new American professor, the "bull in the china shop" who stalks the gardens but sees no beauty, and whose comments are so "rude and ridiculous" that you must flee his presence. But his attitudes force you to face an unpleasant truth: that is what you are soon going home to; that is what you have to live with back in the United States. Take that one step farther and face a simpler truth--at home you will also have to live with yourself.

"I have begun the study of the intricacies of the tea ceremony and have joined a class of Japanese. My teacher, Mr. Kohitsu, tells me I am the first foreigner to take lessons in the art. The fact that I was taking lessons got into the newspapers, and also the statement that I had astonished the old fellows at the school by rapidly identifying the pottery brought out for the occasion."

Its about time. That is one obvious response to this diary entry from early November, just a few days after the visit to the Emperor's gardens. For five years now Morse has collected pottery whose shape, purpose, and value drive largely from an aesthetic created by the great tea masters of the seventeenth century. Yet never has he shown the

slightest interest in tea ceremony, or chanoyu (literally "boiling water for tea"). Not that such indifference is much of a mystery. This elaborate, highly-formalized ritual surround the simplest of acts is not something with much inherent appeal to Western taste. Chanoyu may be seen as a kind of exquisite performance with limited moves and virtually no room for individual expression, a complicated way of structuring, enjoying and--the impatient might assert--of wasting time. For people from a tradition that honors meditation and an inward turn, it can be practical or therapeutic, an excuse to shut out the world and regain the silence of the self. But to someone from a culture that can equate time with money, chanoyu is bound to seem a "grotesque performance" that is "uselessly absurd." If you want a cup of tea, then make a cup of tea, and don't make a fuss.

For Morse, the first experience of tea ceremony is decisive. The time is early August; the place, Fujimi, a kiln on the edge of Nagoya; the host, a master potter who is never named. That he accepts an invitation to take off an afternoon right in the midst of the buying frenzy of the summer trip suggests that Morse is ready for something--but what? There he is, pen and notebook in hand, translator on one side and local pottery dealer on the other, sitting on the verandah of the main dwelling, legs dangling towards the ground, gazing at the tiny tea house just ten feet away. On a long pottery tile are four characters that literally read "wind, moon, clear, stall," and translate as, "The little house as clean and clear as the wind and moon!" An unseen gong sounds, and while vibrations hang in the air,

the three men slip their feet into wooden clogs and hobble to a stone urn where the host pours water on their hands from a wooden dipper, then offers a towel. Under a lattice screen they enter the tea house on hands and knees, creep to the tokonoma to view the kakemono and flower arrangement, crawl back to the other side of the dainty room, adjust themselves in a row and remain silent.

Words won't do it of course--won't catch the feeling. Morse must know that right away, but he does not stop taking notes. So it is possible to share the surfaces of that afternoon, the "simplicity and absolute cleanliness of the room," with its sweet mats, warm brownish plaster walls, and unusual ceiling made of thin, wide ribbons of dark wood, braided like straw. Not much happens really. Several times the daughter of the host formally enters the room through a sliding screen--knees to feet and back to knees--carrying tea bowls, jars, and utensils, and solemnly depositing them next to the sunken fireplace, where a steaming iron kettle provides the only sound effects. In just a certain way, she unties a tea jar from a silken bag, washes and wipes the bowls, scoops the powdered tea with a slender bamboo spoon, adds hot water with a ladle, and stirs briskly. The host takes a bowl, crawls towards Morse, and presents it with a deep bow. Up to the lips it goes for a swallow of "delicious" thick, green syrup, then he wipes the edge and hands it to his neighbor. After all three drink, the host finishes the tea "kneeling upright as if in an attitude of prayer, with a most beatific countenance, smacking his lips with great gusto." Bowls, utensils, and lacquer boxes made to hold them are then passed

around and examined, and in soft voices the four men begin to discuss the age and beauties of the bowls, utensils, and lacquer boxes made to hold them.

So long, so full of detail is his initial account of a tea ceremony, that Morse's later decision to study the art should come as no surprise. Neither should a subsequent near-silence on the subject. Only twice after beginning to take lessons does he ever mention chanoyu, and then only to say that he has performed it once "after a fashion" for some Japanese friends, admires his teacher as a "pottery expert," and is still attending classes at the end of the year. Of the wordless experience itself he remains wordless, unwilling or unable to record thoughts that are his during training sessions or while performing. Later he will downplay the problems of learning tea ceremony, claim that what seems difficult, awkward, or stiff to an untrained eye is simplicity itself. All the movements--the rising and kneeling, the proper placing of the utensils, the sequence in handling them, the making of the tea--are, with few exceptions, both "natural and easy."

Perhaps. But it is hardly natural or easy to envision Morse performing them, to fit him into his own picture of chanoyu, to see this bulky American with a full beard, wearing a suit rather than kimono, bowing into a tea room on his knees, scooping and ladling and whisking with the delicacy he so regularly admires in the Japanese. Surely he must at times feel odd, foolish, out of place, caught in a strange dream. Surely he must wonder at the motivation underlying the

decision to do this, must see it as an act of either freedom or desperation. Surely he must understand that to study tea ceremony is to cross some invisible but significant line, to move beyond the familiar solidity of objects and towards the spirit behind and in them, to let the outer world mate with an inner one unexpressed and held inviolate for so many years.

No. Not yet. But soon enough he will come to understand these things in his own way, with his own words. The decision to study another art form, this one more esoteric than chanoyu and initially much more distasteful, will bring on the revelation in mid-January, less than two months before his departure from Japan. Like everything else in Morse's life, it enters the pages of his diary in prose that gives little sense of carrying any emotional load. Listen: "I took my first lesson in Japanese singing this afternoon. With a letter of introduction, I, or rather my jinrikisha man, found the way to Mr. Umekawa, who lived at Asakusa Minami moto machi Kubanchi. He is a famous teacher of no singing and acting, and has adjoining his house a stage for no play. Takenaka accompanied me as interpreter. We were presented and Mr. Umekawa was very hospitable and seemed pleased that a foreigner should wish to take lessons in singing."

Surprised too, one should think. As the traditional theater of the high samurai, Noh is so static and recondite that even among Japanese it has never achieved widespread popularity. For a Westerner to wish to learn Noh performance is startling enough; for that Westerner to be Edward S. Morse would seem to border on the absurd.

Kabuki, yes--that crowd-pleasing theater of acrobatic movement and special effects is much to his taste, but Noh has to be another matter. Until now the word has never even entered his journals, though comments on music are common enough. The most casual reader cannot fail to be struck by Morse's strong feelings on the subject. If towards tea ceremony he could long remain indifferent, native music has always elicited his wonder, distaste, even hostility. And of all the varieties in Japan, those songs from Noh, named "Utai," are the most difficult for any Westerner to enjoy, or even to accept as anything other than random groaning.

Opinions like this have been his from the very first days. Art and literature may be outside this scientist's normal realm of interest or expertise, but as a self-taught piano player Morse claims "a fair ear for music." In Japan there is plenty to hear. Boat men, laborers, carters, carpenters, fishermen--afloat or ashore, everyone seems to sing at work, only the sounds they make are so "odd," "monotonous," and "weird" that the nation can seem wholly devoid of musical sense. Trained performers only reinforce such a judgment. The samisen and biwa may be distant cousins to the guitar and banjo, but the singers fronting them in tea house or street shows tend to create the most awful squeaks and grunts. Religious music is equally dismaying. At temples and shrines, ensembles of flutes and drums go on for hours, producing "one constant wail of the saddest sounds." Sorely missed are all those elements loved at home--catchy tunes; warm harmony; the power of a full chorus; the rich textures of an ensemble of strings, winds

and brass. No wonder this disappointed comment towards the end of his first stay: "I have as yet heard nothing in Japan that we could regard as music from our standpoint."

A formal concert does nothing to change his mind. Shortly after returning with his family in May, 1883, Morse joins a large audience in a hall at the old Chinese college to hear an ensemble of koto, flute, sho and voice interpret a traditional form named kibigaku: "The performance began with the old man uttering a monotonous series of gruff howls. Had he been suffering from an overdose of cucumbers he could not have uttered more dismal sounds; it was really ludicrous and one found it difficult to preserve one's gravity. While he was making these sounds, another performer picked an accompaniment on the koto. This seemed to be a sort of prelude, for after a while one of the young men began to sing, and the old man played on the flute, and all the instruments started . . . Each piece, though widely different in title, sounded very much alike . . . The title of one of the selections was 'Moon on a Spring Night'; another was named after a certain general; still another was dedicated to a celebrated river; another, which I thought would never end, was appropriately called 'Time.'"

Distaste can be fertile ground for the sprouts of understanding. Or once you're down there's nowhere else but up. Ruminating after the concert, Morse keeps worrying: Is this music in our sense of the word? Surely neither the stiff, sober performers nor the audience can feel any "inspiration or thrill" at sounds which can be described as those of an old man at home "with no ear for music, alone in a woodshed,

absent-mindedly trying to recall some slow-timed and rather dismal hymn." And yet it has to be music, however "widely unlike ours." Human beings pluck and blow those things, so they must be instruments; they raise their voices together, so it must be song. Perhaps the problem is ignorance. Remember: "We thought certain forms of Japanese pictorial art absurd . . . and yet these pictures command the admiration of our artists." Consider: "It may be that their music will ultimately prove to have merits of which we get no hint at present."

Within this comment lies a silent knowledge--that future is closer than he thinks. A few days later Morse has his first favorable reaction to Japanese music when the vocal accompaniment at a Kabuki performance helps to move him through a range of emotions from sadness to excitement to fear. Dredging off the coast of Yezo in July, he begins to hear the chanties of sailors as "musical and catchy." At midwinter, he can enjoy, if not easily describe, the strong rhythms and sounds of a koto and biwa group. Thirty months of absence must make the ear grow fonder, for on the third trip his judgments are uniformly favorable. A solo flute recital by a court musician that once might have sounded thin and boring now seems full of "delicious contrasts" between lengthy notes of "exquisite purity." And if a full ensemble--koto, biwa, sho, and voice--still can sound a trifle "weird," why that word is no longer negative. The music is "impressive . . . sweet . . . distinguished," even when compared with performances at home. At last

he understands enough to admit "the power of music in a new direction," to find merit here "that I had never heard before."

Appreciation is one form of expression, the desire to perform distinctly another. With no decent hint in the diaries, it is impossible to explain exactly why Morse chooses to study Utai. Status? Certainly like chanoyu, this form of music is a taste acquired only by the few. The difficult challenge? That is something he does not really begin to learn until the moment when Umekawa-sensei has him sit with legs bent directly under him and the first lesson begins: "He sang a line and I sang it after him; then he sang another; and so on through the eleven lines of the piece. After trying it twice in that way we sang together. . . . I observed that, do what I would, my notes sounded flat and monotonous while his were full of inflections and accents, though all on one note. I felt awkward and embarrassed at the absurd failure I was making and perspired freely, though it was a cold day in January. Finally, in desperation, I threw off all reserve and entered into it with all my might, resolved, at any rate, to mimic his sounds. I inflated my abdomen tensely, sang through my nose, put the tremolo stop on when necessary, and attracted a number of attendants who peeked through the screens to look on, in despair, no doubt, at a foreigner desecrating the honored precincts with such infernal howls. Be that as it may, my teacher for the first time bowed approvingly at my efforts. . . ."

Praise is nice, but several lessons later he is still not doing very well, at least by his own standards. To keep his abdomen

distended in the proper fashion is "a constant strain"; to remember "two consecutive notes, or to recall any notes" seems impossible. No wonder. With no system of musical notation, the emphasis is on directly imitating the teacher, but Umekawa makes things difficult by slightly varying each rendition of a passage. Assurances that he will soon be able to sing in a Noh play cannot hide a simple truth: Morse will never really perform Utaï, never come close to making those "rich and sonorous" sounds he has begun to love. Comfort comes from knowing that that is not the point. He is at last beginning to understand the music from the inside. And something else, something more important that breaks through into consciousness and the written page on the evening of the very first lesson: "It is by taking actual lessons in the tea ceremony and singing that I may learn many things from the Japanese standpoint."

How long to get here and how good to be here at last, even if here is no location that can be pinpointed on a map. A century later the biographer and reader are implicated as much as--no, more than--Morse himself. Because we are at once more self-conscious and less hopeful than he, more interested in the experience of what it might be to become an other, more cognizant of such hopes and failures in the years in between, more aware of the limitations of both language and reality. For him an insight is all, then without much worry over implications, he returns to the stuff of daily life. Once he was like any--like every--foreigner, his reaction to Japanese music a mixture of "bewilderment" and "laughter." Now he is suspended somewhere between

that and a new identity, caught between East and West, able at special moments to live in two worlds. Pleasure and pain mix closely here; not in general, but in specifics. When, at a concert of classical music that brings tears to Japanese eyes, Englishmen in the audience burst into "contemptuous laughter," Morse cannot--like the natives--withdraw into feelings of cultural superiority, but instead has an intensely "humiliating experience." Which is to say he is learning, or showing, something we have to remember: It is far easier to step beyond the boundaries of one culture than to join another.

Don't forget pottery--Morse never does. It has brought him back; it will send him away. Those large crates ready for shipment across the Pacific represent more than five thousand dollars in capital, borrowed through John Gould's banking connections. But money is hardly the issue--mastery of a subject is Morse's highest aim. During the final weeks, in the snow and winds of winter, he is still on the search for more information, still full of questions as he moves through widening circles of pottery experts. The disagreements, the uncertainties, the conflicts of judgment in the attribution of historic works becomes steadily more disturbing. This is a field in which the following regularly happens: "Lately I have found a bowl with the mark of Fuji, which proves a great puzzle to the Japanese experts. Kohitsu called it Ninsei, Kiyomizu, two hundred years old, but he had never seen the stamp before; Kashiwagi identified it as old Akahata, Yamato;

Ando said it was Hagi, Yamato; Masuda recognized it as old Satsuma; Maida thought it might be Naniwa, Settsu; and another expert, whose name I do not recall, pronounced it Shino, Owari."

Such differences, such difficulties, such "puzzling pieces" all suggest a complexity that Morse tends to ignore, or to see as a problem of culture. The Japanese lack of interest in systematic knowledge can be corrected by a Westerner trained in taxonomy. Surely he is the one who will eventually do away with disagreements and bring order to a chaotic realm. Easy it is to see himself already well along on that path. Take that pottery "guessing party," where he is the only foreigner among five longtime connoisseurs. Each person brings some specimens difficult to identify, which are numbered, listed by someone who does not take part in the contest, and then passed around a circle. While the others grunt, mumble softly, and worry their decisions, Morse makes the quickest of secret written judgments. When pieces are officially identified, he sometimes silently disagrees and confides to his diary, "I am pretty sound on that pottery." At the end of the evening, he cannot restrain himself: "It may be interesting to record that I got the highest number of correct attributions."

Arrogance--a modest arrogance to be sure--has to be the charge against Morse at this point. He has come a long way from shells; he is on a road that will take him much farther. He has learned a lot, but he has evidently not learned enough to know what he does not--cannot--ever know. Which is only to say he is no different from us all. Perfectly in character, he at the end sums up nothing, lingers

sentimentally over nothing--at least not in print, and one suspects also not in the flesh. Late in February his mind is too full of the marvelous trip ahead. He is leaving for China, Java, India, and then on to Europe for the first time. At the age of forty-six, Ned Morse, who once lingered with sailors on the docks of Portland, Maine, is going to circle the globe, meet with scientists and art curators of France, Germany, and England, and speak with them as an equal. Japan will go with him, will color the sights and tastes of every other land, though none will please him quite as much. Perhaps that is why he does not have to write anything like "Sayonara," which he knows to mean "If it must be so."